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SUBJECT: LITHUANIA CONCERNED ABOUT PERCEPTIONS OF PHASED,
ADAPTIVE APPROACH

REF: SECSTATE 96550

Classified By: Pol/Econ John Finkbeiner for reasons 1.4(b) and (d)

¶1. (C) We delivered reftel talking points to MFA's Head of Transatlantic Cooperation and Security Policy Department Director Gediminas Varvuolis and Strategic and Transatlantic Relations Division Head Jonas Daniliauskas on September 17, shortly before the President's announcement (we later followed up with a copy of the President's remarks). We emphasized that the new, "Phased, Adaptive Approach" is simply a more modern approach to missile defense that is better positioned to counter the threat posed by Iranian missile capabilities. We also highlighted that land- and sea-based missile defense interceptors offer some flexibility to be redeployed as necessary in the region.

¶2. (C) Varvuolis initially expressed concern that the U.S. would be perceived as having stepped away from the previous U.S. plan (to deploy a ground based interceptor field in Poland and a fixed radar in the Czech Republic) because of Russian opposition. Nevertheless, he said the concept of sea-based interceptors was of interest, particularly their potential operation in the Baltic Sea. He seemed pleased with proposed plans to develop interoperability with NATO systems and noted that connectivity between U.S. national systems and NATO systems has been an ongoing issue (until recently Varvuolis was Lithuania's Deputy PermRep to NATO).

¶3. (C) In a meeting on September 18, APNSA-equivalent Darius Semaska told the Charge that President Grybauskaite preferred not to make public remarks about the new U.S. approach, and noted that Foreign Minister Usackas planned to discuss the decision with U.S. officials next week while he's at UNGA. Later in the day, the Baltic News Service quoted Semaska as saying "If the new package leads to more effective prevention and defense, then we stand behind it. ...The President will endorse all efforts to combat potential terrorism threats and the spread of weapons of mass destruction with the most effective of attainable measures. ...Technologies are changing, thus the need to adapt plans and measures, accordingly."

¶4. (U) Press coverage of the missile defense announcement was largely negative, though reports of GOL reaction were somewhat muted. Foreign Minister Usackas is quoted as saying "The political message they're sending is not the best one." In the same article Defense Minister Rasa Jukneviciene, commenting on the previous plan to deploy missile defense infrastructure in Poland and the Czech Republic, is quoted as saying "We strongly supported the project because it would have boosted our security. ...Information that was publicly available suggests that Russia was the country that particularly opposed the project. Naturally, many people draw conclusions that this has to do with Russia." However, both Usackas and Jukneviciene said they would withhold further comment until they can discuss further with U.S. officials. The Chairman of the Lithuanian Parliament's Foreign Affairs Committee Audronis Azubalis is quoted as saying "...these actions simply reveal the attitude of the

new U.S. administration towards the Eastern European region."

A headline on BalticReports.com reads "Lithuanians Call
Aborted U.S. Missile Shield a Russian Victory."

¶ 15. (C) Comment. Although GOL officials have expressed some concerns recently about possible U.S. disengagement from Eastern Europe, their initial reaction to the President's decision on missile defense indicates that they may warm to the idea of a flexible approach. The GOL's initial concern was more about the perception of the new approach than about the new approach itself. Press attention is focused more on the U.S. decision to abandon the ground-based interceptor / fixed radar strategy than on the merits of the new Phased, Adaptive Approach. Post will continue to emphasize the benefits of the Phased, Adaptive Approach to enhance the regional security infrastructure. End comment.

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